

LEASING 16TH SECTION LAND



Mississippi Secretary of State Delbert Hosemann and his wife Lynn show off a nice stringer of bass. Secretary of State Hosemann encourages hunters to check out 16th section land leasing opportunities.

By Delbert Hosemann

Mississippi has a great asset in our public land, and it has been my goal since being hired as Secretary of State to see that asset both maximized and protected. We currently have more than 640,000 acres of 16th section land, which last year generated more than \$60 million statewide for our schoolchildren.

When I was seeking election, I prom-

ised the citizens of the State of Mississippi that in the first 90 days of my term, I would publish all 16th section land leases on the internet. In 89 days, that promise was met. Now, you can easily go to our Web site at www.sos.ms.gov to view 16th section land leases in every county in which they exist.

Why is this so important? All funds

generated from 16th section lands go directly back into the schools for the education of our children – the Secretary of State's office does not receive any portion of the funds and neither does the State. For the first time, the general public will get a hands-on view of 16th section land leases, as well as the lease terms. This is a historic step forward in the history of our State lands toward

full and public disclosure.

The local school boards accomplish the initial negotiations of all leases. To ensure all 16th section land leases are fair and equitable, I personally review every 16th section lease that is executed in Mississippi. The signature on these leases is authentic.

I believe a close review and publication of leases by school boards and our

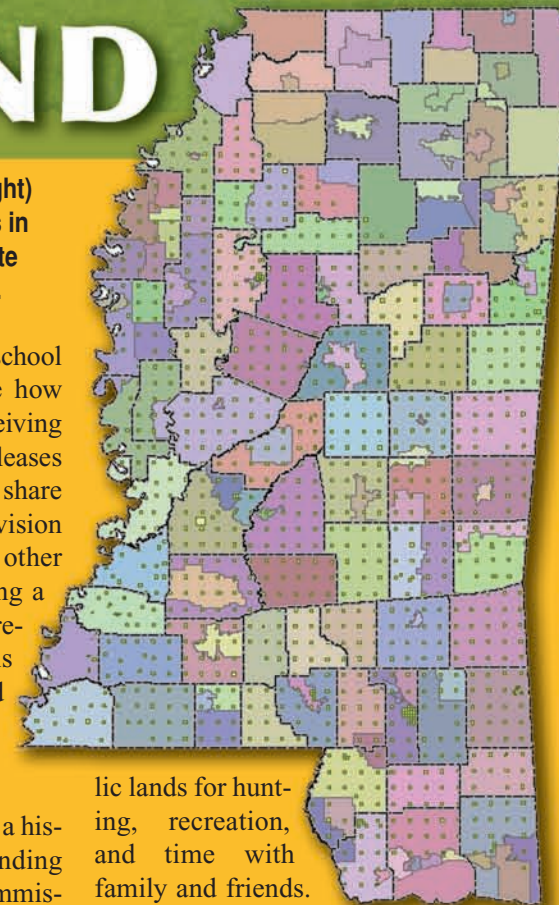
The dots shown on the map (right) are 16th section land locations in Mississippi. Colors differentiate the different school districts.

office offers benefits such as (1) school boards will be able to compare how much other school boards are receiving for comparable 16th section land leases and (2) school boards are able to share the expertise of Public Lands Division of the Secretary of State and of other school boards. We are now seeing a significant increase in the rate of return on our lands as a result of this increased knowledge, scrutiny and public information. This brings much-needed funds back into the hands of our schools.

Our office has also entered into a historic memorandum of understanding with the Mississippi Forestry Commission on how to improve the maintenance and marketing of our state's timber resources. Prior to this agreement, a number of forestry plans were outdated. Now, school districts will be armed with state-of-the-art forestry management plans, which will outline all anticipated costs and determine the best time to cut, thin, etc., the timber on their lands. Again, this will ensure progress in the management of our State forestry lands and boost timber revenues.

For fellow hunters, we have almost 1,000 hunting leases available in our State. If you are interested in acquiring a hunting and fishing lease, there are many still available. One-hundred sixty-three current hunting and fishing leases are set to expire this year, totaling approximately 63,000 acres. Other information available on our Web site includes bid notices, aerial images of particular sections, timber cutting schedule, present lease amounts and contact information for school district 16th section land managers.

I am committed to the use of our pub-



lic lands for hunting, recreation, and time with family and friends. Funds for our schools are best achieved by utilizing our land for both recreation and timber management.

I am often asked why I am so passionate about state lands. You own it, I own it – the people of the state of Mississippi own it.

I want to make sure we preserve Mississippi's natural resources for not only our generation, but also for generations to come. As someone who hunts and fishes in our State, I want to safeguard these lands for my children and grandchildren. I encourage all of you to be empowered with the information that is available right at your fingertips and take a look at what your state has to offer.

Visit our Web site at www.sos.ms.gov and search our 16th section leases. If you have questions or concerns, contact our Public Lands Division at (601) 359-5156.

Delbert Hosemann is Secretary of State for the state of Mississippi.